

## **Submission to Attorney General's Office regarding Referendum on Electoral Reform in BC**

The Victoria Chapter of Fair Vote Canada is a grass-roots organization of over 150 folks from a wide range of backgrounds holding diverse political views. It is non-partisan, united only in its commitment to foster support for any electoral reform which maintains the principles of Proportional Representation (PR) relevant to British Columbia. These principles are as follows:

- **The result is proportional, i.e. seat allocation matches vote percentages.**
- **Voters have effective means of expressing their preferences.**
- **Local representation and accountability are maintained.**
- **The number of MLAs is not reduced in any region of the province.**
- **All votes are for individual candidates.**
- **The size of the Legislature remains about the same.**

Fair Vote Canada is part of the Make Every Voter Count (MEVC) alliance, and is committed to doing just that: making sure that every voter's vote counts through adopting PR as an electoral principle in BC.

To this end, the group strongly supports the inclusion of a mandate question in the coming referendum to enable citizens to indicate their support for PR in contrast to the current first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. Based on the group's door to door canvassing covering the Greater Victoria area, it has found a large amount of support for PR in the Capital Region. Provided that there is a clear mandate question concerning support for PR itself, the group would accept the inclusion of a second, non-binding section of the referendum to enable citizens to indicate their preference for a limited number of PR options that are truly proportional and uphold the principles mentioned above. The group supports engaging Elections BC to oversee the referendum process. The process of reaching consensus upon the form of PR to be implemented should include significant citizen input as well as input from experts in the field.

Collectively, the group favours limited public funding for both sides of the referendum question, say \$500,000 each, matched by up to the same amount from private donations (limited to \$1,200 per individual). It supports recognition of MEVC as the locus of the pro PR campaign because it represents over twenty

groups focused on this matter. Such funding should be subject to reasonable accountability requirements and public reporting of expenditures following the referendum.

In keeping with its own inclusive membership and conduct, the Victoria Chapter of Fair Vote Canada urges ensuring that all eligible citizens have an opportunity to participate in the referendum process. Those without a fixed address or with other impediments to voting should be proactively accommodated.

The group strongly favours using clear, direct, unambiguous language for all promotional materials regarding the referendum. It urges that the question(s) be worded as simple positive assertions so that all respondents can understand the implications of their choices. Further, the group encourages the creation of a well-crafted package of materials setting out the context of the referendum and the implications of various choices so that citizens can find neutral information on FPTP, PR in general, and various possible forms of PR suitable for BC. The ballot itself needs to be available to all eligible voters, easy to read and comprehend, and easy to complete. A simple majority of votes (50%+1) should be employed to judge success of the referendum.

The Victoria Chapter of Fair Vote Canada exists to promote the adoption of Proportional Representation at all levels of government. It recommends that a mandate question be the central component of the coming referendum on Electoral Reform in BC. The group supports MEVC as the proponent for the yes side in this debate, and urges the government to establish practical limits regarding financing surrounding the referendum. Its members are committed to working with others to ensure that PR replaces FPTP for the next provincial general election as a result of citizen input through the current referendum on Electoral Reform in BC.

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